DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 265 483 CG 018 807

AUTHOR Rose, Patricia; Marshall, Linda L.
TITLE Gender Differences: Effects of Stress on Expressed and Received Abuse.
PUB DATE Aug 85
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (93rd, Los Angeles, CA, August 23-27, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aggression; Battered Women; College Students; *Emotional Response; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Relationship; Psychological Patterns; *Sex Differences; *Stress Variables; *Violence

ABSTRACT

Abuse between intimates has begun to be examined. Recent research has studied the incidence and causes of violence in marriages and in premarital relationships. A study was conducted to examine the level of intimate violence, patterns of violence for each gender, and the relationship of stress to violence in adult relationships. Study participants (N=336) were undergraduate students. Females made up 51.8 percent of the sample and males made up 48.2 percent, with subjects ranging in age from 17 to 52. Demographic information, the receipt and expression of violence in adult relationships in the previous 12 months, and the number of stressful life events were measured by questionnaires. Over one-half of the respondents reported expressing or receiving physical abuse at least once. Few reported serious violence but this may have been due to the young age of the sample. Females were more likely to have expressed physical violence than were males but both sexes reported similar rates of received violence. The number of stressful events was significantly correlated with the expression and receipt of violence. The relationship between the expression and receipt of violence and the perception of aggression and victimization should be further explored in future research. (ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED265483

Gender Differences: Effects of Stress on Expressed and Received Abuse

Patricia Rose and Linda L. Marshall

North Texas State University

CG 018807

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Linda L. Marshall

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

Research on abuse between intimate partners is a recent development. The study investigated self-reported abuse among married and unmarried college students. An examination was made of frequencies, gender differences, and effects of stress. Overall, frequencies of expressed and received violence were higher than usually reported, especially when limiting attention to physical abuse. Gender differences were found, with a higher than anticipated amount of physical abuse expressed in the self reports of females, possibly because males may underreport and/or females overreport violence. Although there was a sex difference, generally negative stressful events predicted higher levels of expressed and received abuse. predicted higher levels of abuse.

Gender Differences: Effects of Stress on Expressed and Received Abuse

Only recently has abuse between intimates been systematically examined. Significant levels of violence have been documented in many research reports, while direction of violence and causes of violence have been less consistent. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) published the first study of intimate violence based on a nationally representative sample of married persons. Sixteen percent of Straus's sample had engaged in at least one act of violent behavior in the preceding year, and 28% over the duration of the marriage. They further reported similar frequencies of expressed violence by wives (11.6%) and husbands (12.2%). Straus and his colleagues and Gelles (1980) also concluded that stress is a major contributor to family violence.

Violence between intimates is not restricted to marital relationships. A relatively new body of literature, focusing on abuse in premarital relationships of college students reports premarital violence ranging from 16.5% to 60% when verbal abuse is included (Bernard & Bernard, 1983; Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher & Lloyd, 1982; Makepeace, 1981, 1983, 1984a, 1984b; Plass & Gessner, 1983).

An important area of concern is patterns of abusive interactions as a function of gender. Results have been mixed. Makepeace (1983) found that men were more likely than women to

engage in violent behavior (13.7% vs. 9.3%) and that men were more likely to express the more violent acts and women, the less violent acts (1984a, 1984b). Bernard and Bernard (1983) and Plass and Gessner (1983) found women more likely than men to engage in violent acts in their relationships. However, Straus has found that males tend to underreport violence more than females. Makepeace (1981) found females more likely to be considered the victims and males the aggressors, while Cate and his associates (1982) described abuse as reciprocal. Consequently, there is no clear pattern of gender differences in expressed and received violence.

The causes of violence is another area of major interest. Stress seems to be one variable that is implicated in partner abuse. Makepeace (1983) examined the effects of stress on premarital violence using the Student Life Events Schedule. He found that, for men, undesirable life stress events were associated with increased expressive violence. Desirable stressful events were associated with decreased expressive violence. Later work (Makepeace, 1984a) based on a larger sample, reported that negative life stress events had a moderate correlation (r = .21) with violence for both men and women.

This research examined the level of intimate violence, patterns of violence for each gender, and the relationship of stress to violence in adult relationships. More specifically, the three factors examined in this research were: (a) frequency of abuse, (b) gender differences in the expression and receipt of

violence, and (c) the effect of stress on violence in adult relationships.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 336 undergraduate students at North Texas State University. Six subjects were dropped due to incomplete data (e.g., questionnaires were missing a page). Most of the subjects were females (51.8%, n = 171), with males (159) comprising 48.2% of the sample. The subjects ranged from 17 to 52 years of age. The majority (88.4%, n = 290) were under 25, 6.4% (21) were 26 to 30, and 5.2% (17) were older than 30.

Instrumentation

First, subjects reported demographic information (e.g., sex, age, marital status). Before subjects completed the items on abuse on stress, they read a paragraph introducing the area of concern. Two paragraphs hadd been pilot tested. The following paragraph spontaneously elicited comments most relevant to the study:

> With close relationships, a lot of decisions have to be made and disagreements dealt with. Not enough is known about how this happens. Sometimes you give into the other person and sometimes you try to get what you want. Naturally, this means that there's going to be a certain amount of anger, frustration, disappointment and tension even in the best of close relationships. These feelings are often expressed

physically and verbally. We need to know more about the ways this anger, frustration, disappointment or tension is expressed. This questionnaire will help us to gain this important information. Please be as honest as you can in answering the following questions about your family and close relationships.

The receipt and expression of violence in recent adult relationships (past 12 months), in previous adult relationships (excluding the past 12 months), and the number of stressful life events occurring within the past year were measured using a paper and pencil questionnaire. The occurrence of violence was measured using a list of 10 abusive actions drawn from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). Both verbal and physical abuse was measured. The behaviors ranged from actions considered less serious such as threatening to hit to more serious actions such as using a knife or gun. Participants were asked to rate the subjective frequency of occurrence of these 10 acts.

Stress was measured using the Student Life Events Schedule developed by Makepeace (1983). Since Makepeace focused on unmarried students, modifications extended this scale to include stresses faced by married couples.

Results

Overall Frequencies

According to the data, physical or verbal abuse was expressed by 75% (247) of the subjects in all adult relationships and received by 64% (209). In the past year, 62.1% (207) of the

subjects reported that they had or verbally abused a partner and 47.6% (157) reported receiving such abuse. Subjects reported that physical abuse only was expressed in 51.8% (171) of the adult relationships (37.6% when limited to the past 12 months, n = 124). Physical abuse was reported as being received in 53.3% (176) of the adult relationships (34.5% in the past 12 months, n = 114). Overall, in adult relationships, the results indicated that subjects who abused their partners were also abused by their partners (r = .585, p < .001).

Gender Differences

See Table 1 for frequencies of specific behaviors. No gender differences were found when both verbal and physical violence were examined. If the subjective frequency of occurrence of physical abuse only is considered, reportedly

---

Insert Table 1 About Here

---

females expressed significantly more violence than were males in all past adult relationships (M = 18.59 and 17.58, respectively), $F(1, 326) = 7.08$, p < .01, and in the past year (M = 9.25 and 8.68, respectively), $F(1, 327) = 5.77$, p < .02). On the other hand, both males and females reported receiving similar amounts of abuse. For example, 56.1% (96) of the females and 50.3% (80) of the males reported receiving physical abuse at least once in their adult relationships (in the last year, 35.1%, n = 60, and 34.6%, n = 55, females and males respectively).

See Table 2 for a closer examination of significant differences between the types of abuse more likely to be expressed and received by males and females. Females reported receiving significantly higher occurrences of having something being thrown, smashed, hit or kicked in their presence or being pushed, grabbed or shoved than did males. Males reported being slapped significantly more frequently than females. Females reported expressing such abusive actions as: slapping, kicking or hitting with a fist or with some object significantly more often than did males. Males reported throwing, smashing, hitting or kicking some object significantly more often than did females.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Stress

A series of multiple regressions were performed to determine the effects of stressful events experienced in the past year (as well as the effects of other variables not discussed here), on the subjective frequency of received and expressed abuse during the same time of the different variables. Stress was the only significant predictor of both received (R = .265, p < .001) and expressed violence (R = .1898, p < .001). Stressful events were then partitioned as in Makepeace (1983) into four categories: desirable, undesirable health related, undesirable nonhealth related and neutral.

Overall, the expression of violence in the past 12 months was significantly predicted by undesirable nonhealth related stressful events (R = .203, p < .005). For males, the expression of violence was also significantly predicted by undesirable nonhealth related stressful events (R = .183, p < .005). However, for females, the expression of violence was predicted by undesirable stressful events, both nonhealth and health related (R = .281, p < .05).

The receipt of violence in the past year was significantly predicted by undesirable nonhealth and health related stressful events (R = .338, p < .05). For males, the receipt of violence was significantly predicted by undesirable nonhealth related events and neutral stressful events (R = .341, p < .05). For females, both health and nonhealth related stressful events (R = .449, p < .05) predicted receiving violence.

Discussion

This investigation was consistent with previous research in many ways and provided partially conflicting results in other ways. For example, we found high levels of violence, as have other studies, but our findings showed even higher levels of violence. Considering received physical abuse only (excluding verbal abuse) other research has reported an occurrence rate of 17% to 30% in their samples (e.g., Bernard & Bernard, 1983; Makepeace, 1981, 1984a, 1984b). Over half of our sample reported expressing or receiving physical abuse on at least one occasion. The differences that exist between frequency of occurrence of

violence could be due to a regional difference in actual frequency of occurrence and/or the willingness to report the violence. Clearly, however, partner abuse is not uncommon.

Only a few individuals in our sample reported instances of very serious abuse (e.g., beating up, threatening with or using a knife or gun). However, most subjects were also young. It is certainly possible that the seriousness of abuse escalates with age and life experiences. It is also possible that there is a "contagion" effect whereby if abuse occurs in one relationship, when it breaks up, both or one of the partners may take the same pattern into the next relationship. Given both the frequency of reported abuse and the frequency with which relationships break up, this could become an even more serious problem. It is imperative that future research address some of these possible implications.

Unlike Makepeace (1983), no gender differences were found in overall frequency of expression or receipt of verbal or physical abuse. When only physical violence was examined, females were significantly more likely to have expressed violence than were males. However, both sexes reported similar rates of received physical violence. There are a number of possible explanations. It may be that males underreport and females overreport expressed violence or they may respond to violence with violence. Since the occurrence of violence of a most serious nature (e.g., using

a knife or gun) was reported rarely, it is possible that with a larger sample more gender differences would have been found.

Future research should address issues of which partner initiates the violence and try to determine the responses to that initial violence. There may be gender differences in defensive behaviors. Especially if other research replicates our findings of higher expression of violence among females, sex differences in strength must be addressed. It is unlikely that a female slapping or shoving a male would have the same effect as a male slapping or shoving a female.

Stress as an important causal factor in intimate violence was once again highlighted in our research. In keeping with previous findings (e.g., Makepeace, 1983; 1984a, 1984b; Straus et al., 1980) the number of stressful events was significantly correlated with the expression and receipt of violence.

It is worth emphasizing that research addresses an individual's stress whereas abuse occurs within couples. There are important considerations when attempting to understand the function of variables like stress. For example, what effect does one person's stress have on the other person? Since a person's stressors are likely to be shared with the other member of a couple, it is not clear whose stress may be leading to the increase in abuse. In the present study, the number of undesirable nonhealth related stressful events was a significant predictor of all types of violent interactions, for both men and

women, with undesirable health related stressful events contributing significantly to the expression and receipt of violence by women. Neutral stressful events were associated with receipt of violence by males.

Work in the area of abuse between intimates is fraught with difficulties. Attempts to answer questions usually result in the raising of more questions. The present research emphasizes several points. First, there is a high prevalence of abusive interactions. Second, this research further emphasizes that both males and females report receiving and expressing abusive acts. Third, although the exact role that different types of stressful events play in increasing violence is unclear, increases in the number of stressful events does appear to increase the number of abusive acts for both males and females.

In future research, the relationship between the expression and receipt of violence and perception of aggression and victimization needs further exploration. While the relationship of number of externally defined stressful events to the occurrence of partnership abuse has been investigated, the relationship of subjective stress needs to be examined. By tying together stress and abuse, better predictions and interventions can be used in this important area of social concern.

References

Bernard, M. L., & Bernard, J. L. (1983). Violent intimacy: The family as a model for love relationships. Family Relations, 32, 283-286.

Cate, R. M., Henton, J. M., Koval, J., Christopher, F., & Lloyd, S. (1982). Premarital abuse: A social psychological perspective. Journal of Family Issues, 3, 79-90.

Gelles, R. J. (1980). Violence in the family: A review of research in the 70s. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 42, 873-885.

Makepeace, J. M. (1981). Courtship violence among college students. Family Relations, 30, 97-102.

Makepeace, J. M. (1983). Life event stress and courtship violence. Family Relations, 32, 101-109.

Makepeace, J. M. (1984a). Courtship violence as resource exchange. Unpublished manuscript.

Makepeace, J. M. (1984b). Courtship violence and gender: The real victims are ? ? ?. Unpublished manuscript.

Plass, M. S., & Gessner, J. C. (1983). Violence in courtship relations: A southern sample. Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology, 11, 198-202.

Straus, M. A. (1979, February). Measuring intrafamily conflict and violence: The Conflict Tactics (CT) Scales. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 41, 75-88.

Straus, M. A., Gelles, R., & Steinmetz, S. (1980). Behind closed doors: Violence in the American family. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Table 1

Percentages of Males and Females Engaging in the Various Types of Violence

	Males		Females	
	Expressed	Received	Expressed	Received
Threatened to hit or throw something	38.7	41.5	44.4	37.4
Thrown or smashed or hit or kicked something	60.3	39.7	52.6	52.0
Thrown something	18.2	27.1	26.3	24.6
Pushed, grabbed, or shoved	39.0	33.4	45.6	51.5
Slapped	11.9	29.0	33.9	20.5
Kicked, bit or hit with a fist	6.9	17.0	18.7	14.6
Hit or tried to hit with something	9.4	12.0	21.6	17.5
Beat up	3.2	4.4	.6	6.4
Threatened with a knife or gun	1.9	2.5	1.2	3.5
Used a knife or gun	.6	.6	0	0

Table 2

Types of Violence by Gender

	Males $\bar{X}$	Females $\bar{X}$	F	p
Received violence-ever*				
Thrown, smashed, hit, kick something[a]	2.81	3.24	8.38	.004
Pushed, grabbed, shoved	2.65	3.06	8.84	.003
Slapped	2.63	2.33	6.17	.014
Expressed violence-ever**				
Thrown, smashed, hit, kick something[a]	3.40	3.06	4.60	.033
Slapped[a]	2.17	2.54	20.68	<.001
Kicked, bit, hit with fist[a]	2.10	2.32	10.42	.001
Hit, tried to hit with something[a]	2.15	2.33	6.26	.013

[a] significant in the same direction for recent 12 months.

* df 1, 327.

** df 1, 326.